

NIGHTMARE HOUSE
A TWO-YEAR VIGIL WITH DEATH

by
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SHERIFF C.E. CARMAN

NEMAHA COUNTY, KANSAS

AS TOLD TO VIRG HILL

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Waves of heat shimmered visibly over the paving in the hamlet of Seneca, Kansas, and the 1,854 residents of the community moved about on sluggish, leaden feet. A drought, more sustained than even the oldest inhabitants could recall, held all the Middle West in its grip and a merciless sun which beat down day after day on parched fields and blistering buildings was so unrelenting that a lethargy had claimed people. Many of them had adopted the Mexican custom of having a siesta during the hottest part of each day.

The morning of July 2nd, 1934, was monotonously like many other mornings had been---hot, quiet, and with a vague hint of a tornado. A tornado did not come, but within forty-eight hours several of us in the town were to snap out our half-coma and become as mentally and physically alert as only tragedy in its most shocking form could make us.

Postmaster W. L. Kauffman, in office only a short time, was about to start on a course which was to unfold a tale as bizarre as any conceived by Poe. Kauffman was aggravated over rumors he had been hearing; an aggravation made the more acute because of jittery nerves occasioned by the baking sun.

"Miss Maze!" he called.

Miss Hattie Maze, who had been the assistant to several postmasters, looked up inquiringly and answered him.

"I propose to settle this question about old Mrs. Bishop's pension checks today!" the postmaster told her.

Miss Maze indicated her satisfaction, for the matter had also been troubling her for some time.

Mrs. Marietta Bishop, widow of a Civil War veteran, and recipient of a \$30-a-month pension check each month, was known to everyone in Seneca, as was her fifty-nine-year-old daughter, Mrs. Mrytle Lattimer.

Referring to his Postal Laws, Postmaster Kauffman learned that pension checks cannot legally be delivered if the person for whom such checks are intended has died or moved away.

Accompanied by Miss Maze, the postmaster went that morning to the three-room house in northwest Seneca, where Mrs. Bishop had lived for many years with her daughter, Mrs. Lattimer. The daughter answered the knock at the door.

"You can't see mother now---she's taking a bath," was her surly retort to the postmaster's request for an interview.

"That's all right," the postmaster replied. "I've brought Miss Maze with me, and she can see her. We'll let her go in, and your mother can sign her pension check in her presence. Just a formality we must observe, and it won't take a minute."

But the daughter refused to admit Miss Maze, saying only: "I have my reasons".

Nettled, the postmaster replied somewhat sharply that he would send the check back to Washington. At this threat, Mrytle Lattimer's attitude changed, and she invited him to return the following afternoon at three o'clock.

Kauffman did not return at the appointed hour, however, for Harve Drown, a rural mail carrier, reported next day that he had seen Mrytle, the daughter, trudging along U.S. No. 36 Highway, going west, about an hour after the postmaster had left her house on Monday.

As Sheriff of Nemaha County, I was notified of the situation on Tuesday, July 3rd, the day the mail carrier supplied this information, and Harry A. Lanning, Nemaha County prosecuting attorney, was told at the same time.

Knowing of Mrs. Bishop's advanced age and infirmities, and believing it possible that Mrytle might have left her mother alone at the house, I went to the home with the County Attorney, and entered by using a skeleton key.

The scene which greeted us was so offensive that I can recall it clearly now by shutting my eyes. Near the door were three bird cages in which were five canaries and a lone love bird. Love birds

should live in pairs, and the solitary confinement of the one represented the first note of tragedy.

There were several bedraggled Persian cats, and a French poodle dog. At the sight of strangers, one of the cats made a mad attempt to scramble up a wall. The floor of the kitchen with dirt and hair from the cats and dogs, and the bird cages were in a filthy condition.

In the southeast corner of the kitchen we found a small pantry where there was a quantity of rancid and moldy food. A little window in the pantry had evidently been used as a place through which slops were thrown to the ground outside. The walls were covered with dirt and grime of years' accumulation, and in one corner was a cot with some foul-smelling blankets thrown across it.

In the two north rooms were scores of dresses, some of which had apparently never been worn nor taken from their boxes; also a hodge-podge of merchandise including a gasoline iron and hair dressing liquids.

There were mail-order catalogues by the dozen, and an old writing desk was half buried beneath a great stack of old letters and papers. Insects scurried out when the mass was disturbed, and it was difficult to walk about the rooms since almost every inch of floor space held its share of the accumulation of litter.

Mrs. Marietta Bishop, Mrytle's mother, was not to be found, and there was no indication that she had been there recently!

With a premonition that some awful thing was about to be discovered, and yet unable to predict what it would be, I went back uptown with the County Attorney.

The next day was Independence Day, the 4th of July, and I returned to the hovel and liberated the birds, the cats, and the dog. With the nation celebrating its release from oppression and the birth of a new freedom, it was perhaps fitting that the animals and birds were on that day given the freedom so evidently denied them for so long.

That day I asked Berlin Zimmerman, a postal clerk, to call the postal inspector at Kansas City, and request a Federal Investigation, since I believed there was possibility Mrytle had been

obtaining pension checks by fraudulent means, but it did not occur to me that we were on the verge of discovering information which would later cause the people of Seneca to refer to the three-room hut as "The House of a Thousand Nightmares," and with good reason.

There was little concern about the absence of the daughter Mrytle Lattimer. I believed she would return, since as far as I knew she had nowhere to stay, and on Friday morning, July 6th, my theory proved correct.

At 9:44 that morning, Mrytle got off a train which came into Seneca from the West, and I was notified from the depot of her arrival. I had previously made arrangements with Harley Wilcox, on duty at the station, to obtain such information. I told County Attorney Lanning, and a little later in the morning we again visited the Bishop-Lattimer home.

When we arrived the dog was not in sight, and no cats nor canaries were to be seen about the place. On our previous visit we had looked into a little shed a few feet from the house, and I distinctly remembered that we had left the door open. This door was now closed.

Feeling certain that Mrytle had returned home, I knocked, and called out that I was the sheriff, but there was no answer.

The County Attorney went to a window and tried to raise it. I went to another, and found a place where I could peer in through a torn curtain. What I saw caused me to jump into action, for Mrytle was sitting on the bed in the Northwest room, dressed in her night clothing, and she was holding a small bottle in one hand.

Running to where the county attorney was struggling with the window, I helped him force it open, and crawled through and seized Mrytle.

She was holding a handkerchief smelling of chloroform and the bottle she held in her hand contained half an ounce of the poison.

Meaning in pain and rage, she snarled out that she had drunk about half the bottle of chloroform.

Let me alone! she screamed at me. I want to die! I remained with her while the county attorney went to my residence at the county jail, for my wife, who came back with him, and helped

Mrytle dress. Then we all went to the jail.

Doctor S. A. McCool, the County physician was called, and administered hot milk as anemetic. We waited anxiously for the result. Would Mrytle die and leave her secret untold? Why had Mrytle taken poison? Why did she wish to die? Where was her mother? These and other questions kept crowding into our minds until gradually the effects of the poison she had taken wore off, and, except for some internal burns and those on her lips, Mrytle recovered.

The questioning began, and we kept at it for hours. Sometimes County Attorney Lanning said, although I thought he had been most tactful, made Mrytle angry.

"Shut your d---mouth!" she lashed out at him, and we knew it was useless for him to keep on questioning her.

The County Attorney left. Realizing I was dealing with a temperament as changeable as a chameleon, I proceeded cautiously, and tried to gain her confidence. I used gentle methods, such as a man would employ in approaching a skittish horse.

"Mother is in St. Louis, visiting," she finally told me, but it was not until hours later that she gave me the whole truth in all its horror-filled details.

In order to understand why her confession threw the town into a state of excitement such as it had never before known, it is necessary to go back a few years, and look into the lives of the mother and daughter. Many of the incidents which had a bearing on the case were familiar to scores of people about town, but they were not understood by anyone in their true significance at the time they occurred.

For about fifty years the mother was known in Seneca as a gentle, lovable soul, a seamstress, who occasionally did nursing. Born April 21st, 1844, at New Georgetown, Pennsylvania, she was the daughter of Hester and Henry Crocker. The family left Pennsylvania in 1860 and moved to a farm ten miles west of Dubuque, Iowa. They were there a year, in Illinois five years, then in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and in 1872 moved into Seneca.

Marietta met her first husband, Henry H. Crocker, in Pennsylvania when she was only fifteen years old, being attracted to him partly because he had the same name as her father. She met him again at Cedar

Falls, Iowa, and married him after her family moved to Seneca. He was a Civil War Veteran, and it was because of his war service that she was later to draw the pension money. He died March 10th, 1878, near Perry, Iowa, and was buried there.

Some years later she married John T. Bishop, who died long before the events which bring this story to a climax began to occur. Myrtle was the daughter of her first husband.

For several years prior to the summer of 1934 the mother was not seen about their little place, and people spoke of her as an invalid.

As to some of the incidents which Seneca people recall so vividly now:

A Kansas State Highway Department repair shop, located a few yards west of the hovel where Myrtle attempted suicide, is the only other building in the entire block, except two small sheds in the rear of the Bishop-Lattimer home.

John Moser was stationed at the shop for two years, and frequently Moser as well as his helper, Alfred Woltkamp, saw the daughter, Myrtle going from her home to the little shed most distant from the house. Entering the building, she would remain a short time, and then come out, casting the residue of what had been in her pail out on the grass.

It was after such a visit, on July 28th, 1932, that she stumbled out of the shed, screaming: "Fire!"

The highway shop workers turned in the fire alarm, and when Seneca's efficient volunteer firemen arrived from their station a few blocks away they found a trunk in the little shed. Although it was apparently worthless, Myrtle insisted that it be saved.

"That trunk contains something precious of my mother's," she declared.

She begged the firemen to leave the trunk unopened, and when John Moser, the highway shop man, accidentally broke off a corner with an iron bar, he observed the trunk had a grayish color, as if lime had been poured out over it.

Refusing help from any of the men standing about, Myrtle seized the trunk, rolled it about fifty yards away from the fire, and stood guard over it until the firemen and everyone else had left.

People who were there observed that the shed reeked with a foul odor, but they ascribed this to the fact that many things can give off unfamiliar odors when burning. The shed was only partly destroyed by the blaze.

The incident of the trunk was forgotten,--and Myrtle went about her way as usual, having placed the trunk in a shed nearer the house.

Myrtle occasionally went to the Levick grocery store, and to other stores in Seneca, ordering tea of a special brand, saying her mother was particularly fond of it. Almost every store clerk in town was familiar with her habits, and learned to expect her requests for certain things which would please her mother.

Frequently, as she went to the beauty parlor, or to the ladie's rest room at Seneca's fine new city hall, or met friends at other places about town, she was asked about her mother's condition.

"Mother is not feeling quite so well today", she would sometimes answer "but I'm sure she would like to see you. Perhaps tomorrow."

But if a visitor went to the house the next day, Myrtle's ponderous body blocked the door, and Myrtle would explain her mother was no better, and could see no one.

For a time Myrtle was alone at the house, she said, her mother having gone to Kansas City to live with a sister while recuperating from an operation for cancer of the throat. Then, for a while, Myrtle talked of a nurse who was caring for her mother at the home in Seneca.

People have since told me of meeting Myrtle in the dead of the night, stalking about the neighborhood like an awkward ghost in white her nightgown flapping eerily in the breeze, easily distinguished by reason of her familiar, ponderously rolling walk.

"The nurse is taking care of mother --I couldn't sleep," Myrtle would explain to those who dared question her.

On April 19th, 1934, the Seneca Courier-Tribune printed this item Myrtle had taken to the office:

Next Sunday, April 21st, will be the 90th birthday of Mrs Marietta Bishop. Her friends are invited to send a post card shower. Mrs. Bishop is unable to walk, but sits up each day in her chair, and eats all her meals except breakfast with

her daughter, Mrs Myrtle Lattimer, and her nurse, Mrs Smith. Mrs. Bishop had a remarkable recovery from a long, serious illness.

In acknowledgement of the cards and gifts received at the shower, Myrtle gave this item to the same newspaper:

Mrs. Marietta Bishop, 90 a week ago Saturday, received post cards and other gifts, including a bouquet and two cakes, from persons whose names she did not learn. Mrs. Bishop was greatly pleased.

Apparently, it was not noted at the time that her mother's birthday anniversary of that year, 1934 was quoted in one item as being on a Sunday, and in the next as being on Saturday.

Early in the summer of 1934, Myrtle went to a drug store in Seneca and asked for something to kill a smell, saying that a cat had died beneath her house, and that she couldn't remove it. She was advised to use chloride of lime, and after that she bought box after box of it. Mail carriers, and others who went to the house, remarked about the abominable odor they detected there.

At about the time she first went to the drug store to buy lime, Myrtle talked to Cyril Lauer, a Seneca mortician, about embalming, stating that her mother was ill, and might die. She also inquired about cremation---a method of disposing of dead bodies not commonly practiced in our section of the country.

Lauer sent for information about cremation, and one evening he went to the Bishop-Lattimer home talking the matter over in detail with Myrtle, as they sat in the kitchen, with the connecting door to the other two rooms closed. The place was not so filthy at that time, but Lauer was troubled by an odor which eluded identification.

Myrtle inquired in detail about the processes of cremation, and she later visited the Lauer undertaking parlors and asked to be shown embalming methods. It was also observed that she attended a number of funerals in which she could have no normal interest, but people were accustomed to her eccentricities, and thought little of it at the time.

There were those who doubted that Myrtle had ever been married, since none in Seneca had been introduced to a Mr. Lattimer, but there was no way to disprove her statement about the marriage, if anyone had chosen to do so. Years before, she had left Seneca and returned after

a short time, calling herself "Mrs. Lattimer." Folks just let it go at that.

Several neighbors recalled that they saw a motor car parked in front of her home several times, early in the summer of 1934, and they remembered that the machine carried Missouri state license plates, but the driver was not identified.

All these things---the items in the newspaper, the buying of special things for her mother, the fire at the shed in the rear of the house, and Myrtle's strange behavior about the old trunk were recalled to me while as Aheriff, I questioned Myrtle about her attempted suicide..

"My life so far has been nothing but a living lie!" she finally burst out. "I've nothing to live for now. I hope to God I die!"

Then, with dry eyes, she related her personal history, told me of the months when she had led a sort of Jekyll-Hyde life in her little hovel of a thousand nightmares, and in business places about town---a story so incredible that I made an investigation before telling anyone but those officially concerned.

I called Coroner W. R. Popkess, who lives in the adjoining town of Sabetha, and that afternoon we went to the Bishop-Lattimer home.

In the little shed which had been investigated by the County Attorney and me when we first began to look into the case---we found the old trunk, under piles of blanket's and rubbish.

The trunk was opened. A sickeningly-sweet stench arose.

The grisly remains of the lower part of a human body were revealed!

Continuing to act on directions given me by Myrtle, we found a large fruit jar on a shelf of a cupboard in the shed, in plain view. The large jar contained the remainder of the body, an unsuccessful attempt at cremation having been made.

I later learned from store delivery boys that they had taken chicken feed, coal, and kerosene to the shed a number of times, and had seen the fruit jar with its ghoulish contents, but had not suspected the truth.

Coroner Popkess made a careful examination of the remains.

"I think this body has been hacked with an axe or some such instrument," he finally told me.

He pointed out that some parts of the body, where a felonious blow might have been inflicted, were missing, and might deliberately have been removed to destroy evidence. There were also indications of an injury to the vertebrate, he said.

The remains of the body were taken to the Lauer Funeral Home, and within a few hours the town was agog with the news that gentle old Marietta Bishop was dead, and that her body, partly dismembered, had been found.

Many suspected Myrtle Lattimer of murder, and all sorts of stories were circulated, although only a few of them were correct.

The Seneca Courier-Tribune referred to Myrtle as "The Monster Woman," and the phrase caught public fancy.

Myrtle refused to talk to the County Attorney and to the coroner, but she somehow had confidence in my statement that I was trying to help her.

She demanded napkins when her food was served to her in the jail-- a strange gesture of fastidiousness when one considers the filth in the hovel where she had been living---and she complained that her food was not cooked to her liking. She reproached me for releasing her pets, saying the birds would starve or be eaten by cats, yet, at the very time she spoke with compassion of canaries and cats and the poodle dog, she was telling me a story which, except for the evidence we had found, could scarcely have been believed.

"Mother died the morning of January 28th, 1932," she told me in a matter-of-fact tone.

That was two and a half years before the body was discovered by us!

Myrtle said she scribbled the date on a piece of paper, and that it was somewhere in the house. I later managed to uncover the note in the heap of papers in one of the rooms.

"Mother died a natural death," Myrtle went on. "I left her on the cot in the kitchen during the day, and that night I carried her in to one of the north rooms and placed her on the daybed. Then I went back into the kitchen, locked the door leading to the north rooms, and slept that night on the cot where mother had died.

"I once told mother that I might keep on drawing her pension checks after she died, since I had been signing for them for some time, but she

to move it. In broad daylight I put it in a big pasteboard box - all doubled up, and carried it out to the shed. I didn't even cover the box over. Some men were working at the highway shop not far from the house, but they didn't notice. After I got the body to the shed at the alley I put it in an old trunk. Later, every few days, I would go to the shed with a pail of lime, and sprinkle more lime on mother.

"Everything went along all right until the fire at the shed. I was afraid the trunk would be broken open then, and next day I tried to cremate the body.

"I know the Coroner thinks I tried to hack the body to pieces with something, but I didn't. The lime had already caused the body to fall apart some, so I put the head in an old trash burner in the back yard, and used kindling and coal oil to burn it, but it wouldn't burn very well. I put part of it in the fruit jar and the rest back in the trunk, where you officers found it."

She was talking as abstractedly as if discussing ordinary actions, and I saw no sign of remorse. Her eyes snapped with anger occasionally, however, as she told of her terrible secret being revealed.

"When that postmaster came and began to make trouble about the pension checks," she went on, "I knew I had to leave, so I went and I'll never tell you where---but I had to come back home to die. I had decided to take poison, and then set the house on fire. I wanted to write a note and tell where to find mother's body, but I didn't know where to leave the note so that it wouldn't be burned. When you came after me I took the poison."

Now, with her confession completed, she thought only of death, and earned me she would kill herself at the first opportunity. I hired Mrs. Chris Diehm, a capable, kindly, motherly woman, to guard her at the jail until Federal Authorities could take action in her case.

One night Mrs. Diehm awoke to find Mrs. Lattimer standing over her, peering down over her, with an intentness that shocked the guard.

"Why...what's the matter?" asked Mrs. Diehm, as the cat-like eyes continued to stare. Mrs. Diehm is a brave woman, but she was startled.

"You looked just like you were dead!" Myrtle exclaimed, and then shuffled back to her own bed, her bare feet making no sound.

Nemaha County did not wish to prosecute Mrs. Lattimer. The case

told me I would get into trouble if I tried. Well, when she did die, I was ready---or at least thought I was. I had several plans of disposing of the body, but none of them worked out right. I thought once that if someone who was sick should be brought to our house, and should die there. I could slip mother into the same coffin and both bodies could be buried at the same time.

"I thought about cremation. That's why I talked to Cyril Lauer about it. I finally did try it, but that was later. I went to several funerals, thinking I might pick up some ideas. I could have buried the body in the yard, but cremation appealed to me most.

"During the winter the body was on the daybed in the cold north room, and I kept it covered with a blanket. I knew that in warm weather it would begin to smell, so I sent for a cedar chest, the one you found thinking it would be all right for a coffin, and that the cedar chips would keep down the odor. But the chest didn't seem right after I had it, so I never used it. One reason is because the drayman who brought it said in a joking way something about using it for a coffin. I believed he was joking, but I thought he might be suspicious.

"I used to go into the room in the daytime, sit on the chest and look at mother, there on the day-bed, hour after hour. It didn't seem so lonesome that way. Then I'd cover her up and go out, but I never went into the room at night.

"When warm weather came I knew I had to do something, for the house was filled with an odor, steadily growing worse. Bugs began crawling over everything, and I noticed that the mail carrier seemed suspicious when he stopped at the front door, which opened into the room where mother lay."

We were sitting in such a manner that Myrtle could look out of the window, in the direction of the house of tragedy, only a few blocks away. There was a trace of horror in her eyes as she stared out and continued her story.:

"I got along all right in the daytime, and got used to telling lies to people, downtown, but at night it was awful," she told me. "I couldn't sleep, and I sometimes had to take little doses of chloroform. Sometimes I would get up in the middle of the night, and walk around the neighborhood in my night clothes.

"The body had been in the house about six months when I determined

seemed one proper for Federal Authorities, so we turned over to the government charged her with forgery on six counts, since she admitted forging her mother's name to pension checks once a month for the two and a half years her mother had been dead.

On July 18th, 1934, she was indicted by a grand jury at Topeka, on six counts of forgery, and on December 4th, 1934, she entered a plea of guilty to all six counts in Federal Court at Kansas City, a distinguished jurist.

The court's sentence amounts to virtually three years. Judge Hopkins sentenced Myrtle to three years on the first count; to three years on the second count, but probated; and to three years on each of counts three, four, five, and six, but to run concurrently with the first count. In effect, it is a three-year term.

Judge Hopkins specified that she should be confined to the Federal reformatory for women at Alderson, West Virginia, a new institution which houses some of the most notorious women of modern crime. Donald C. Little, an attorney appointed by the court to defend Mrs. Lattimer, declared his client had been broken in health by her six months in jail, and requested a short sentence.

Some time after she was sent to Topeka, burglars looted her home of many of the dresses and things she had stored there, and someone even stole the cedar chest she had bought for a coffin.

The little house had attracted the attention of thousands of morbidly curious people, and even now it is a source of interest to Seneca visitors. Many have gone to the Seneca Cemetery, to look at the grave where the remains of Mrs. Marietta Bishop were laid to rest August 7th, 1934, beside her husband, John T. Bishop.

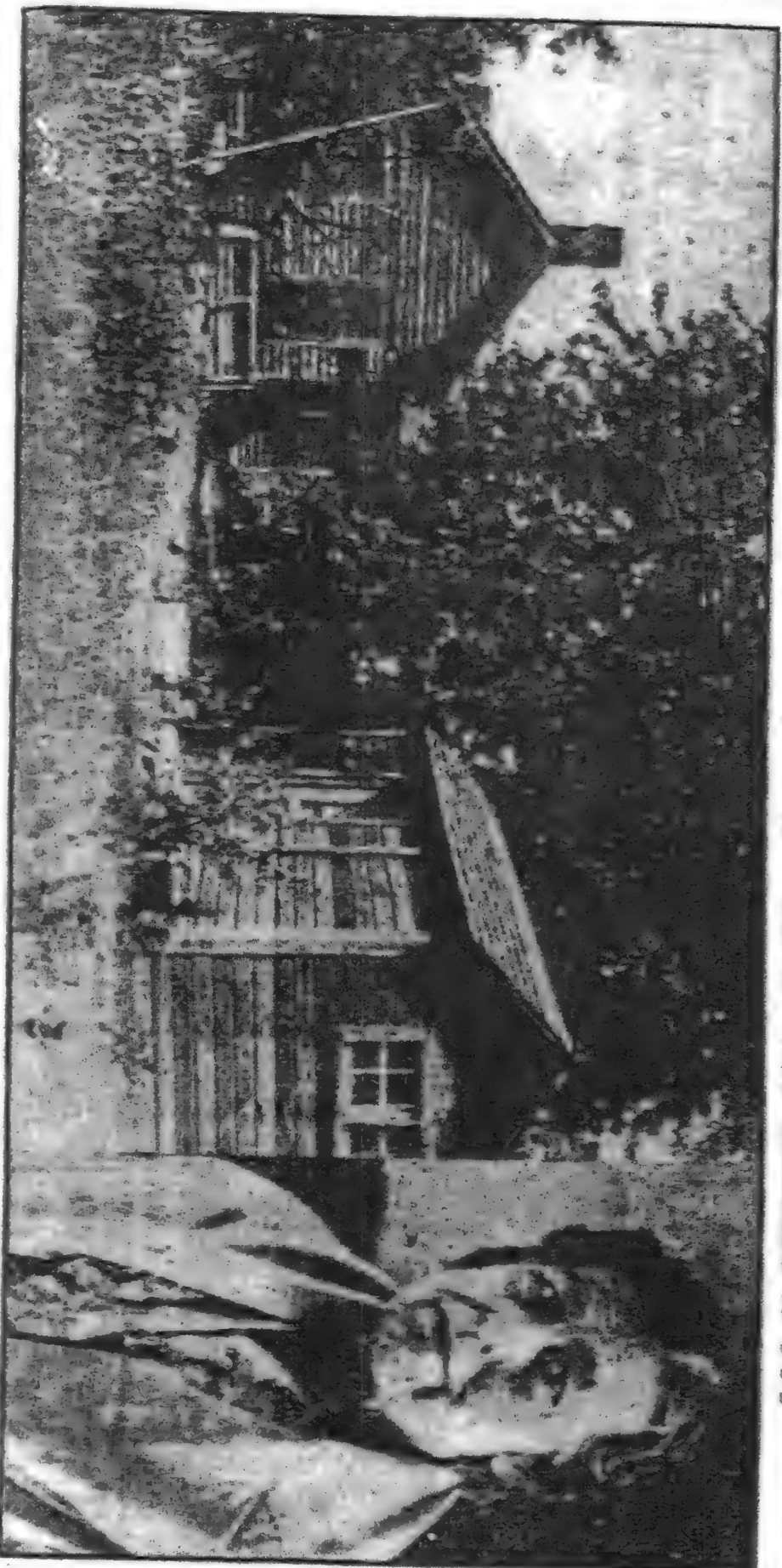
The funeral of Mrs. Bishop was attended by only three persons Cyril Lauer, the undertaker; the Reverend Harry R. Weed, her pastor and John Smith, the sexton. The service was not publicly announced, in order that gentle old Mrs. Bishop's last rites might be conducted peacefully and without the stares of the curious hundreds who would have assembled. She was buried in the same trunk in which her body had been kept for so many months.

THE END

[Tuesday, July 10, 1934]

THE ST. JOSEPH NEWS-PRESS.

SCENE OF WEIRD PENSION PLOT AND WOMAN WHO CARRIED IT OUT



Associated Press Photos.

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer (right above) of Seneca has admitted to county officials that she kept secret the death of her aged mother for two and one-half years, concealing part of the body at their home, in order to collect the mother's Civil War pension. Mrs. Lattimer signed the name of her mother, Mrs. Marietta Bishop, to the check. Above is the Lattimer home, showing the shed in which part of the body of Mrs. Bishop was found when investigators sought to learn why Mrs. Bishop never received or cashed her Civil War pension check in person. Mrs. Lattimer asserted her mother died of natural causes.

"Scene of Weird Pension Plot and Woman Who Carried It Out," The St. Joseph News-Press, 10 Jul 1934, page 3.

SENECA WOMAN IS GIVEN SENTENCE

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer Admits Forgery and Is Given Five Years.

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, 56 year old Seneca woman, pleaded guilty on Wednesday morning before Judge Richard J. Hopkins of the federal court in Kansas City, Kans., to six charges of forgery and was sentenced to five years in the federal reformatory for women at Alderson, W. Va.

Mrs. Lattimer was arrested on July 6, 1934, at her home in Seneca, after federal and county officials learned that she had been concealing the body of her 83-year old mother, Mrs. Martella Bishop, for two and one-half years and collecting Civil war pension checks. Prior to the death of Mrs. Bishop Mrs. Lattimer cashed the checks with the permission of her mother. According to a confession made shortly after her arrest, Mrs. Lattimer said that her mother died a natural death in January of 1932.

She said that she dismembered the body and hid it in the home. County officials found the body where she said it was concealed.

The plea of guilty by Mrs. Lattimer Wednesday morning was a surprise to the court. Judge Hopkins had appointed district attorney Donald Little, to act as Mrs. Lattimer's lawyer. The trial was expected to begin next week.

Mrs. Lattimer was taken from the Tulsa jail last week and lodged in the Wyandotte county jail.

With her attorney she appeared in court Wednesday morning and announced that she desired to plead guilty. The charges of forging her mother's name to six checks were read to her. She pleaded guilty on all six counts.

Judge Hopkins sentenced her to three years on the first count. On the second count he sentenced her to five years, three of which are to run concurrently. She was sentenced on the other four counts to five years each, the sentences to run concurrently.

Mrs. Lattimer showed no emotion when pleading guilty or when Judge Hopkins announced the sentence. She was neatly dressed in court, but showed the strain of five months' imprisonment in the Tulsa jail.

MRS. LATTIMER MUST SERVE PRISON TERM

TOPEKA, Kas., July 22—(AP) —Probation of a five years sentence of Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, 73, of Seneca, Kas., from the federal industrial institution for women at Alderson, W. Va., was revoked by Judge Hopkins here Wednesday. Sentenced in 1934 when she pleaded guilty to fraudulently cashing Civil war pension checks forwarded to her dead mother, whose body was uncoined at her home for two and a half years, Mrs. Lattimer was released on probation at Alderson last March. Her appearance in Federal court here followed her arrest and a 10-day sentence in jail at Pawnee City, Neb., for obtaining money under false pretenses in the sale of hosiery.

CASHED IN ON DEAD MOTHER

Daughter Indicted for Forgery in Collecting U. S. Pension.

TOPEKA, Kan., July 18. (AP)—Mrs. Myrtle Laumer, Seneca, Kan., accused by officers of concealing the dead body of her mother in her home for two years to collect a Civil war pension from the government, was indicted today by a federal grand jury on charges of forgery.

CREMATES BODY IN KITCHEN RANGE

SENECA, Kan., July 7. (AP)—A woman who said she had kept her 88-year-old mother's dismembered body hidden more than two years to collect a Civil war pension is being held today by authorities.

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, about 55, directed Sheriff C. E. Carman and other officers to the body, parts of which had been cremated in a kitchen stove, after Postmaster W. L. Kauffman had demanded to see the woman to whom the \$40 monthly pension check had been issued.

DISMEMBERS BODY OF OWN MOTHER

Hides Pieces So As To Col-
lect Pension Parent
Was Receiving

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Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, about 55, directed Sheriff C. E. Carman and other officers to the body, parts of which had been cremated in a kitchen stove, after Postmaster W. L. Kauffman had demanded to see the woman to whom the \$40 monthly pension check had been issued.

Mrs. Lattimer said her mother, Mrs. Marietta Bishop, had died a natural death in January, 1932. She said she did not disturb the body from its bed for several months, but finally decided to dispose of it. The upper part was cremated, she said, while the other was placed in a trunk at the home.

Sheriff Carman said that Mrs. Lattimer had used various subterfuges to cover up her mother's death. To friends who called, she would say that her mother was too ill for visitors. Frequently, she would give stories to the newspapers, the officer said, that her mother was visiting relatives in Kansas City.

Hides Mother's Body for Thirty Months to Collect Pension

Woman Confesses Partly
Cremating Remains in
Kitchen Stove.

By Associated Press.

SENECA, KAN., July 6.—Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, about 33, was in jail tonight while officers investigated her story that she had kept secret the death of her mother two and a half years ago, hidden the body and continued to collect a civil war pension.

Sheriff C. E. Carman said that part of the body had been found in a trunk in a shed at the rear of the three-room house. There was evidence that other parts had been cremated in the kitchen stove.

Throughout the house were found many boxes of articles purchased by Mrs. Lattimer. They included 32 dresses.

Lived in Isolation.

"There had been rumors circulated, but until recently no attention was paid them," Sheriff Carman said.

"The house where Mrs. Lattimer lived with her mother, Mrs. Marietta Bishop, is rather isolated. When anyone would go there to see Mrs. Bishop, Mrs. Lattimer would tell them she would speak to her mother and let them know the next day if they could visit her. The next day she would say her mother wasn't feeling well.

"Meanwhile, Mrs. Lattimer, who is separated from her husband, continued to indorse and cash the pension check, which amounted to \$40 a month. One bank finally refused to cash it any longer unless proof was supplied that Mrs. Bishop had indorsed it. So Mrs. Lattimer took it to another bank.

New Postmaster Suspicious.

Then Seneca got a new postmaster, W. L. Kauffman. He got suspicious and told Mrs. Lattimer he would not give her the letter containing the check unless he could be assured it was reaching Mrs. Bishop.

"Last Monday the postmaster and a clerk went to the Lattimer house. Mrs. Lattimer met them at the

Continued on Page 4A, Column 6.

Hides Mother's Body and Cashes Pension; 5 Years

Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 5.—[Special.]
—Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, 55 years old, Seneca, Kas., pleaded guilty today before Judge Richard J. Hopkins of the federal court to six charges of forgery and was sentenced to five years in the federal reformatory for woman at Alderson, W. Va.

Mrs. Lattimer had been concealing the body of her 88 year old mother, Mrs. Mariett Bishop, for two and a half years and cashing civil war pension checks.

IOLA, KANSAS

KANSAS BRIEFS

(By the Associated Press)

Kansas City, Kas.—Thomas Saunders, a salesman for the Armour packing company here, told police yesterday that three bandits abducted him at Lawrence Wednesday and hung him by his wrists from a bridge near Tonganoxie until he disclosed where he had hidden \$100 in company receipts, of which they robbed him.

Leavenworth—Mrs. Luella Richardson, 87, who came to Kansas in a covered wagon 80 years ago, died here last night. Mrs. Richardson came here from Kansas City, Kas., where her parents brought her from Iowa.

Kansas City, Kas.—Mrs. Myrtle Latimer, 55, was brought to the Wyandotte county jail here from Topeka yesterday to await trial in federal court Thursday on a charge growing out of her alleged forging of her dead mother's signature on government pension checks.

Mrs. Latimer, whose home is at

Seneca, Kas., is charged by the government with having concealed the body of her mother, Mrs. Marietta Bishop, 88, for two and a half years after her death so the mother's Civil war pension would not be discontinued.

Kansas City, Kas.—Thieves used the music in two churches here yesterday to cover up the noise of their activities in cloakrooms. More than \$50 was taken from the purses of women choir members at the Zion Evangelical church and an overcoat was stolen from St. Paul's Episcopal church.

Winfield—It's a long time since bawling herds passed through this country on the old Chisholm trail, but the branding of cattle is not quite a lost art.

The Kansas Homestead Rehabilitation corporation has filed its brand at the Cowley county courthouse, the first brand to be registered here for three years. The brand is an "R" inside two circles.

Since the branding law was passed by the legislature 88 years ago, 162 brands have been registered here.

July 7, 1934.

Hides Mother's Body to Collect Her Pension

Continued from First Page.

door. They asked to see Mrs. Bishop. Mrs. Lattimer told them her mother was taking a bath. The postmaster then said that he had a woman in his car who could see Mrs. Bishop. Still Mrs. Lattimer refused. So the postmaster refused to turn over the check, but said he would come back the next day. The postmaster notified my office. I went out there Tuesday and broke into the house. The only sign of life around the place was some cats and dogs. Mrs. Lattimer had left.

Break Into House.

"Later I learned she had been seen walking along Highway 36. This morning I learned that Mrs. Lattimer had been seen getting off an early morning train in Seneca. So I took some of my men and went out to the house again. Evidently Mrs. Lattimer was in bed when we broke in. Hearing us, she ran and grabbed a bottle containing an anaesthetic and tried to swallow it, but we stopped her before she drank very much.

"We've notified the Department of Justice. I do not have any reason to believe that Mrs. Bishop was slain. She was about 80 years old when Mrs. Lattimer said she died. About as near as Mrs. Lattimer could recollect, that was in January, 1932.

"Mrs. Lattimer said the body remained on the bed for six months. Then she placed it in the trunk. She told us she had attempted cremation because her mother had expressed a wish that she be cremated.

"No charges have been placed against Mrs. Lattimer as yet."

Miscellaneous

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, whose parole from a federal institution was revoked last week in Topeka federal court, after she served a 10-day sentence in Pawnee City, Neb., for obtaining money under false pretenses in the sale of hosiery, is believed by Undersheriff Glenn Bergman to be the woman who was picked up here June 17 for Pawnee City officers to face such a charge. She was known to Bergman as Nellie Sharp. Mrs. Lattimer was originally arrested for fraudulently cashing her mother's pension checks and concealing the body of her mother several months after the elder woman died. . . . A lo-

CHARGE PAROLE VIOLATION

Myrtle Lattimer Taken to Topeka by U. S. Marshal.

Deputy U. S. Marshal O'Grady returned Monday night from Topeka, Kas., after taking Myrtle Lattimer, 73, to Topeka from Pawnee City, where she had been arrested by Sheriff Donahue. She is charged with violation of a parole. She was given a bench parole when she was sentenced in 1934 for signing pension checks of her dead mother and getting the money.

She lived at Seneca, Kas., at the time her mother died and hid the body for several years and during that time continued to receive the pension money. She served a three years sentence on one count at Alderson, W. Va. She is charged with violating the parole on the other count by going over the country and selling merchandise, upon which it is alleged that she received deposits, but the merchandise, it is claimed, was not delivered. She will be arraigned at Topeka before the federal judge on a charge of violation of her parole.

PAROLE REVOKED.

TOPEKA, Kas. (UP). Federal Judge Richard J. Hopkins late Wednesday revoked the parole of Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, Seneca, Kas., on a charge of writing worthless checks. She will be returned to the federal women's prison at Alderson, W. Va., to finish a five year sentence. Mrs. Lattimer, 73, was convicted in 1934 of hiding her mother's body after she died in order to prevent the loss of government pension money. She was arrested in Pawnee City, Neb., Monday, accused of accepting deposits on hosiery sales and then failing to deliver the stock.

Myrtle Lattimer's Trial In December

Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, Seneca woman who kept her mother's dead body more than two years in order to continue to draw her mother's pension checks, will go to trial in federal court at Kansas City, Kans., during a term which begins Dec. 3. Mrs. Lattimer is charged with forgery, since she forged her mother's name to pension checks she cashed. It is possible a murder charge may be filed against her, but it is thought unlikely this will be done, since some officers who have investigated the case believe the woman's mother died a natural death.—Hiawatha World.

MYSTERY STIRS KANSAS TOWN

Daughter Admits Cremating Mother After Natural Death.

Seneca, Kan., July 7.—(AP)—A shoddy figure Saturday night entered the investigation of the death of Mrs. Marietta Crocker Bishop, 63, whose dismembered body was found Saturday where it had lain for nearly three years.

Tentatively identified as "Ray Crocker of St. Louis," presumably a nephew of Mrs. Bishop, aged Civil war widow, authorities said they learned he had received her pension check after her death.

Her daughter, Mrs. Myrtle Latimer, 54, who confessed she allowed her mother's body to lie on her deathbed for several months before dismembering and cremating parts of it, was held for questioning by federal agents. She refused to comment on the existence of "Crocker."

According to Mrs. Latimer's story to Sheriff C. E. Carman, Mrs. Bishop died of natural causes Jan. 1, 1931. Desiring to continue collection of her mother's war pension check she failed to report the death or provide burial. Instead, she told authorities, she concealed part of the body in a small trunk and cremated the rest.

Several requests of neighbors and post office authorities to see her mother was refused on grounds the elderly woman was in St. Louis or too ill to be seen.

Suspensions were aroused when Mrs. Latimer was seen leaving town. Upon her return, Harry Lanning, county attorney, and Carman investigated.

When the officers forced their way into the home, Mrs. Latimer screamed she had swallowed part of a bottle of chloroform. Quick action prevented her from consuming the remainder.

Three hours of questioning led to her confession that Mrs. Bishop died two and one-half years ago. She led officers to an outbuilding where the trunk containing the lower portion of the body was hidden beneath several blankets.

"Mother was a frail little woman," she said. "When she died I left her lying in bed in a cold dark room. At the time she died there were zero temperatures and the body was frozen. Early in June I dismembered the body. Mother had always told me she wanted her body cremated. I reduced the upper part to ashes, the lower part I put in a trunk and stored in the shed."

Carman said there was nothing to indicate Mrs. Latimer killed her mother. He pointed out that she would have gained nothing by her mother's death as she had administration of her mother's funds.

Mrs. Bishop had lived here more than 60 years. Her daughter is known as an eccentric. She disappeared 23 years ago and returned later with the announcement she had married. Latimer never has been known here.

REVOKES PAROLE OF WOMAN, 73, ON BAD CHECK CHARGE

Topeka, Kan., July 22 (AP)—Federal Judge Richard J. Hopkins late Wednesday revoked the parole of Mrs. Myrtle Lattimer, Seneca, Kan., held in Pawnee City, Neb., on a charge of writing worthless checks.

She will be returned to the federal women's prison at Alderson, West Virginia, to finish a five year sentence.

Mrs. Lattimer, 73, was convicted in 1934 of hiding her mother's body after she died in order to prevent the loss of government veteran's pension money.

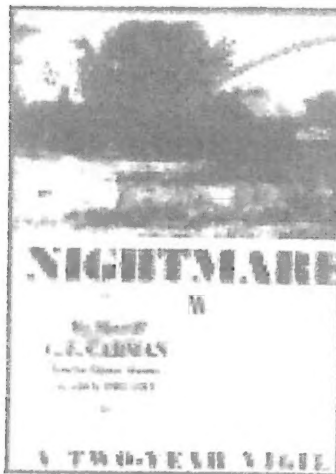
She was arrested in Pawnee City Monday, accused of accepting deposits on hosiery sales and then failing to deliver the stock.

NIGHTMARE HOUSE

Seneca, Kansas
July 1934

This short story came out in Master Detective Magazine in 1934 after the bizarre ordeal that came to light in Seneca, Kansas about July 4, 1934. This created excitement like was never known in our town before or since. There were all kind of roomers and speculation. The courier ran nearly two pages on the story.

Click on the pictures to read the account as portrayed by this magazine and also the account as printed in the Courier Tribune on July 3, 1934.. Some of these pages may load very slow on smaller computer and small modems. They will open if given time. Perhaps in time some can typed this up and put it on in a better form.



Page 1



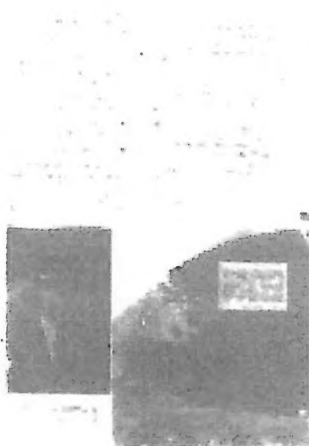
Page 2



Page 3



Page 4



Page 5



Page 6



Page 7



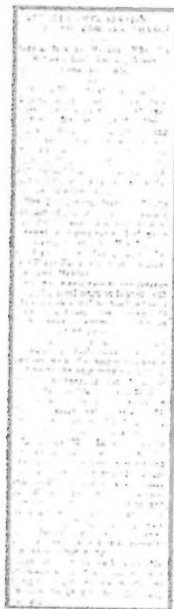
Page 8



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Page 9

Myrtle Latimer is Convicted
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page 9

Home page



Courier Tribune page 1

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